

the

Hoover Historical Log

The official newsletter of the Hoover Historical Society, Hoover, Alabama



Members of the Historical Society met at Wild Roast Café with Historian Marjorie White (left, front) and Landscape Architect, Birgit Kibelka (center) to discuss Bluff Park Preserve and other information about the community—the subject of our September meeting!

Bluff Park: Then & Now

Join us for Bluff Park: Then & Now on Tuesday, September 19 for the first of our fall meetings. We will gather at the Hoover Public Library at 6:30 PM.

Today Bluff Park is a close-knit community in suburban Hoover. The Shades Crest Road and Park Avenue Historic District encompass its historic homes and churches. But where's the park that gave the community its name?

We will explore the history of this beloved community and the Bluff Park, once the centerpiece of Hoover's earliest subdivision that currently presents itself for consideration in the City of Hoover's ongoing park planning process as a future Hoover city park: The Bluff Park Preserve.

Our speakers will be Landscape Architect Birgit Kibelka and Historian Marjorie White. Working with the Birmingham Historical Society over the past decade, Kibelka and White have documented historic landscapes for the National Park Service and the Alabama Historical Commission,

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Community rallies for Bluff Park Preserve

Editor's Note: In our Summer 2023 edition, we shared information from the Friends of Shades Mountain (FOSM) president, Larry Rodick, on plans to promote the creation of a Bluff Park Preserve.

The proposed preserve would include an 18-acre site including Hale Springs, the Tip Top site, and Lovers Leap. This vision ensures preservation of the springs area, improving the trail leading to the springs, and getting "the preserve included in the Hoover Park Plan," stated Marjorie White, President of the Birmingham Historical Society. *Continued on Page 4*

Save the Date! 2023-24 Programs

September 19
Bluff Park: Then
& Now @ HPL at
6:30 PM

November 14
Paul Davis,
Genealogist

Jan. 16, 2024 Stacye
Hathorn, Archivist for
The Clotilda and
Africatown

March 14
Jim Langley, Tour of
Hoover info

May 21, 2024
Hallie Cotton, The
Cahaba Project

Grants awarded to six local students

Local business sponsors for these grants are **Signature Homes** and **V & W Supply**—owners **Carlo & Dianne Joseph**

The Hoover Historical Society administers a scholarship grant program each year with help from sponsors in the community. The scholarship committee revised the ‘prompts’ this year to focus on volunteerism and community service and its impact on students’ decisions for the future.



Academic grants awarded included \$1,000 to Alexander Brockmann from Hoover High for his essay, “*Scouting, Service, and Selflessness: My Journey to Becoming A Volunteer for Life.*” Alex is attending at Loyola, majoring in Economics. His grant was a gift from Carlo and Dianne Joseph, owners of V & W Supply. Clayton Spencer, a Spain Park senior, entitled his essay “*Community Service: Chore or Necessity?*” and attends Auburn University studying Building Science.

Since 2019, Jonathan Belcher, President Signature Homes, has sponsored grants for students enrolled at Hoover’s exemplary Riverchase Career Connection Center (RC3)—a career training facility housing five academy programs including Skilled Trades. These students often enter the workforce immediately upon graduation. This year, Signature increased the number of recipients to four grants. Selected by counselors and instructors were Jaydn Minson (Brigham Young Univeristy); Kevin Tran (UAB); Zane McPeters (Troy); and Caden Hofstetter (Jeff State and entering the Heavy Equipment workforce.) Each received tools of their trade and/or funds for continued education or both. (Photo: Pam Thompson of the Scholarship Committee with Clayton Spencer, Zane McPeters, and Jaydn Minson)

And the Crouch Award goes to...

By Linda Joseph

Each year, the Society honors someone who has contributed significantly to the organization. This deserving member is recognized for outstanding service and dedication. The award honors Jack Crouch, founding member of the HHS and developer of The Folklore Center. This year’s recipient keeps a low profile but always gets the job done with quiet and sincere demeanor. This person is

known to efficiently organize family reunions and directories and with an amazing memory, knows everyone’s birthdays, anniversaries—even extended family, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews. This person shies away from the spotlight, but is always present, willing to help, never says no, and works behind the scenes with aplomb. HHS has benefited greatly through the years as volunteer hours have racked up—working as Assistant Editor on a special issue of the newsletter, organizing the Folklore Center’s anniversary this past fall, and serving as both Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. The Society depends greatly on this recipient who even volunteered to ‘man’ the registration table today...we are pleased to present this year’s Jack Crouch Award for volunteering to Edna McWilliams!! (Photo: Edna with Joe & Amy Lewis (sister, left), Melanie Payne (sister) and niece Helen Megginson.)





A message from our president...

I recently became involved with the National Society of Colonial Dames XVII Century and so attended my first board meeting that included members from chapters across the state. The level of patriotism with this group of Dames is amazing. The flags were given proper respect, naturally, and the various pledges to preserve the heritage of our great nation and to keep memories of patriots at the forefront was given prominent attention. Even the music was of historic significance. There were parallels with our HHS group, and their purposes line up with our own—for example, to place markers at places of historic importance, encourage high school and college students through scholarship grants, and to collect memorabilia of importance.

I would like for our historical society to keep a collection of those Patriots who are connected to Hoover. If you have an ancestor who deserves remembering, whether someone who served in the military or provided good or services to our nation, please write a paragraph or two about them and

send to me. We would love to include them in upcoming issues. Include your name so that we know whom to credit as a relative. Please read about our own Patriot, Tommy Tucker, below.

The HHS invites you to another fascinating year of celebrating history through our programs. Our officers have signed on for another year: Pam Thompson, First Vice President/Programs; Carolyn Kolar, Second Vice President/Membership/Archivist; Ginny Peterson, Recording Secretary; Caroline Boone, Sunshine/Corresponding Secretary; and Mark Swindall is Treasurer with Edna McWilliams as Assistant Treasurer.

Our Committee heads include Debbie Burtnett as Newsletter producer, Scholarship Chair and Assistant Archivist; Jim Langley and Gene Fuller caretake The Folklore Center and the Stinson Ole Place; and Becky Swindall is our Hospitality Chair.

Additionally, Jim Langley oversees our historical marker program.

You won't want to miss our meeting in September. It is a chance to learn about an area of Hoover that deserves a place in history preserved in perpetuity for future generations.

Come hear about it and become a part of history. Here's to celebrating our heritage!

— Linda Joseph

In Memory...

"Old Marine" Tommy Tucker and Dr. Charles Hickman

Tommy Tucker, long-time Bluff Park resident and frequent contributor to the HHS, passed away in early May. He was a frequent visitor at Bluff Park Elementary where he loved talking to students about "his school." In June, the Society lost member and author of the History of the Hoover City School System in 2017 and more recently updated (2022) with co-author Dr. Ron Dodson, Charles Hickman. Both are sorely missed! More on Tommy in a future edition; for a copy of Charles' book (\$20) that benefits students needing fees for field trips, contact us at info@hooverhistoricalsociety.org.



Hoover History Tour...continued from Page 5

Modern Hoover really began in the 1940s when insurance executive William Hoover built a two-room log cabin as a family getaway on land down the hill from Bluff Park on an old logging road called Tyler Road. In 1947, he built a colonial style brick home, later purchased by the Randle family. On the Hoover tour, a highlight for most people is the actual tour of the house hosted by Barbara and Ed Randle.

In the 1950s, as the Montgomery Highway was expanded, Mr. Hoover began buying property in the area. He moved his insurance company in 1958, and the Hoover community began. One of the first businesses was Green Valley Drugs that stands today as the oldest continuous business in Hoover and retains an old-fashioned soda fountain and grill.

As we ride around modern-day Hoover, the sixth largest city in the state, we go by Mr. Hoover's insurance company building and the one by four block area where Hoover started with a population of 400 people in 1967. In that area, we drive by what was called the Motor Mile with its many automobile dealerships. On the other side of the road is the Hoover Mall, which thrived in the early 1970s with 21 stores, but was eclipsed by the Galleria Mall in 1986. The original city complex with jail, Fire Department and city offices is now an unremarkable building occupied by Geico, an insurance company.

The Hoover of today has splendid municipal buildings—most built in the 1980s—including the City Hall complex, one of the best small-town libraries in the country, a great senior center, and a large public safety center that houses cybercrime units, state forensics, and the municipal courts. The Hoover Met has been the home to some famous baseball players and the Southeastern Conference (SEC) tournament. The Finley Center will soon compete for conventions and large functions. The new complex of sports fields will provide premier facilities for local activities.

A tour of Hoover would not be complete without touring one of the jewels of the city, Aldridge Gardens—a 30-acre paradise of nature, specializing in world-famous hydrangeas, owned by the city of Hoover.

The Hoover Historical Society has been in existence since 1989 and the archives have recently moved to the Hoover Public Safety Complex and is the repository of the historical records for the city of Hoover. The Society provides information to interested residents through trips and tours, bimonthly programs, special events, newsletter, a Facebook page, and a Website, www.hooverhistoricalsociety.org. Or, email us at info@hooverhistoricalsociety.org.



September speakers are Birgit Kibelka (left), a Landscape Architect and Marjorie White, Historian.

Then & Now

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including the Civil War-era bridge (aka Ross Bridge); the 1871 railroad wonder, Brock's Gap; the 1913 Altamont Park; and the 1920's planning for Mountain Brook. (Documenting includes research, photographs, and maps assembled in printed histories.)

Preserve

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Bluff Park was designated in the legal deed of 1901 recording of the 1885 sale of Gardner Hale's lands as a private park for the use of purchasers of lots, **not** residents. The purchasers are listed in the deeds, and legal clarification of what this 'private park status' means today is under study. Marjorie White will discuss this project at our September 19th meeting at 6:30 PM in the downstairs meeting room of Hoover Public Library. As always, these programs are free and open to the public and we invite everyone to attend this important meeting!

Hoover History Tours...with Jim Langley

—HHS Research Historian

Even though Hoover, Alabama was incorporated in 1967, there's a world of history within its borders. It is hard to imagine that the woods, hills, hollows and streams were once the ceremonial and hunting grounds of Native Americans, including the Woodland people, the Mississippi Mound Builders and the Muskogee clans (often referred to as the Creeks.) Their existence becomes more real when you walk the Boulder Field and streams of Moss Rock Preserve, or you stand looking over the cliff listening to the legend of Lovers Leap in Bluff Park. That all changed when General Andrew Jackson defeated The Creeks in 1814, and the settlers began streaming into the Alabama Territory.

With few improved roads and no railroads, the area experienced a quiet and slow-paced existence with a scattering of small farms, but little or no industry or large plantations. The exception was the "good air" of the Summit, now Bluff Park, where settlers in the Valley around Elyton and Jones Valley escaped to get away from the many cholera epidemics experienced in the 1800s.

On our history tour, we explore Bluff Park. One can walk down the path to Sunset Rock and visualize why people would come here for the awesome vistas. We imagine the medicinal natural springs, and cabins built by Octavia Spencer for tourists, and the resort it became under Gardner Hale and his extended family. We envision the 500-acre peach farm as we pass the Overseer's House. We see the house that William and Evan Hale referred to as their Shangri-La. Across the road, we experience what an 1840s homestead was like.

We travel the route of the old stagecoach and wagon trail over Shades Mountain, the last mountain of the Appalachian chain. On the

Road, we are reminded of the old wooden store which served as a stagecoach stop. We see the site of the old Summit School and Baptist Church and the adjoining cemetery, built at the end of the 19th century. Later we pass the new school, built in 1923, which has now evolved into Bluff Park Elementary. We look out over the spectacular view where the Bluff Park Hotel and Resort were built in 1909. We can still see the old homes built in this time-frame along Shades Crest. Nearby, we ride through the Children's Fresh Air Farm built by Independent Presbyterian Church in 1924 which still serves inner-city kids.

The Civil War brought change to the area, especially in the valleys. It was during this time that James Taylor Ross allowed the Confederate Army to build a railroad bridge on his land to allow transport of iron ore for munitions from Oxmoor furnaces through Brock's Gap to the other side of Shades Mountain and on to the Selma Arsenal. Brock's Gap, a 75-foot-deep cut in the mountain through limestone bedrock and Ross Bridge are still there, as part of Hoover's history.

After the Civil War, with completion of the railroad system, the iron ore and coal industries boomed. Much of Hoover is located above a large coal bed called the Cahaba coal fields. These coal fields sprouted a new town called Acton, that became a source of work for area settlers. Acton and the 42 square acres of coal mines were developed by Harbert Corporation into what we call Riverchase.

Families like the Tylers and Pattons, early settlers, worked on farms and in the mines. They also established schools and churches like Patton Chapel Church and school built on land donated by Robert Patton in 1866.

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HOOVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Membership Form

Make checks payable to **Hoover Historical Society**
P.O. Box 360233 Hoover, Alabama 35236-0233

Or pay online via Pay Pal at our website:
www.hooverhistoricalsociety.org

Types of Membership

Individual	\$10
Couple	\$20
Sustaining	\$50
Patron	\$100
Corporate	\$150

NAME : _____

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E-MAIL: _____

PHONE: (Home) _____ (Work) _____ (Cell) _____

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SKILLS: Computer _____	Fundraising _____	Publicity _____ Leadership _____
SPEAKERS/PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS: _____		

The Hoover Historical Society

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